



Fast Facts

CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH SERVICES

NEWBORN HEARING SCREENING PROGRAM

Background

The California Newborn Hearing Screening Program (NHSP) establishes a comprehensive coordinated system of early identification and provision of appropriate services for infants with hearing loss by:

- Offering the parents of approximately 400,000 infants the opportunity to have their newborn babies screened for hearing loss at birth.
- Tracking and monitoring up to 25,000 infants annually to assure that appropriate follow-up testing and diagnostic evaluations are completed.
- Providing access to medical treatment and other appropriate educational and support services.
- Providing coordinated care through collaboration with agencies that deliver early intervention services to infants and their families.

The incidence of permanent, significant hearing loss is approximately two to four per every thousand infants. Hearing loss is the most common congenital condition for which there is a screening program. It is estimated that the NHSP will identify 1,200 infants in California with hearing loss each year.

The major focus of the NHSP is to assure that every infant who does not pass a hearing test is linked quickly and efficiently with the appropriate diagnostic and treatment services and other intervention services needed for the best possible outcome. Recent research shows that infants with hearing loss who have appropriate diagnosis, treatment, and early intervention services initiated before 6 months of age are likely to develop normal language and communication skills.

The California NHSP

The California NHSP has four major components:

1. **Education and Outreach Campaign** - The NHSP education and outreach campaign includes the development and distribution of appropriate educational materials for pregnant women, families of newborn infants, and physicians.

Materials describe the value of early hearing testing, the meaning of test results, and

how the program works. A media campaign will be developed to further promote the NHSP, which will include an information video.

2. **Screening** - All California Children's Services- (CCS) approved hospitals will offer hearing screenings to all newborns born in their hospitals or receiving care in a CCS-approved neonatal intensive care unit (NICU) prior to the infants' discharge. The Department of Health Services will assure the quality of the screening tests by certifying that the hospital's hearing screening program meets CCS standards. This certification will allow the hospitals to be reimbursed by the state for Medi-Cal-eligible infants. The process will be phased in so that the over 200 CCS-approved hospitals will have certified programs by December 2002.

When fully implemented, the NHSP will serve approximately 400,000 infants - over 70 percent of the total births in California. Funding is available to reimburse hospitals for the testing of infants whose care is paid for by the Medi-Cal program. This will provide payment for about 50 percent of the infants tested. In order to be certified, hospitals must demonstrate that an internal system is present that:

- uses appropriately trained and supervised individuals to perform the tests;
- uses appropriate equipment;
- has a commitment to staff physician education;
- has a commitment to family/parent education; and
- has policies and procedures in place to assure the forwarding of test results and referral of infants with abnormal test results to appropriate care.

3. **Geographically-Based Newborn Hearing Coordination Centers** - The centers, a concept unique to California's NHSP, will assure that the system operates efficiently, the screenings and services are of high quality; and, most importantly, babies failing the hearing screening test are not lost to follow-up. In states without coordinated tracking systems, up to 50 percent of the infants who fail the inpatient screen do not receive the necessary services to determine if a hearing loss is present. It is essential that infants who do not pass the screening tests receive prompt evaluation and intervention. Otherwise, the benefit and purpose of early screening and identification is lost. Each center will be responsible for a specified geographic area. The functions of the centers include:

- assisting hospitals to develop and implement their screening programs;
- certifying hospitals to participate as screening sites;
- monitoring programs of the participating hospitals;
- assuring that infants with abnormal hearing screenings receive necessary follow-up, including rescreening, diagnostic evaluation, treatment, and referral to early intervention service agencies, as appropriate; and

- providing information to families and providers so they can more effectively advocate with commercial health plans to access appropriate treatment.

4. **Data System** - It is vital that the NHSP have a reliable data management system. This system will be utilized by the hospital programs and geographic-based centers and will be consolidated into a centralized statewide database at the Department of Health Services. The data system will be an essential tool for monitoring program activities, recording test results, tracking follow-up appointments, case managing children needing assistance in accessing services, monitoring quality indicators, and generating the data needed for reports.

Contacting the NHSP

For more information about California's NHSP, please call (916) 323-8005.